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29 September 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF USIB
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SUBJECT: General Assessment of [REDACTED] Soviet Plans and Policies Re-
lated to the German Situation [REDACTED]

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1. The report outlines a Soviet course of action in the Berlin crisis which is plausible in some respects and considerably more ominous in intention than other information and experience has led us to conclude. In brief, the report asserts that Khrushchev has already decided to sign a German treaty "right after" the Party Congress and "to strike first against the West if the situation warrants action" after the treaty is signed. In the meantime apparent Soviet readiness to negotiate is designed to keep the situation in hand while Warsaw Pact maneuvers and resumed nuclear weapons tests put the USSR in the best posture for eventualities including attack. An attack against Iran is also envisaged, and the Communist Chinese will "protect against attack from Japan."

2. The report runs contrary to the current assessment that Khrushchev thinks he can make progress towards solving the Berlin situation on his terms through negotiations and that he does not regard nuclear war as a means of achieving this objective. It suggests that Khrushchev is prepared and willing to run much higher risks than we had thought. The report is not entirely clear on the question of what "situation" would warrant a Soviet "strike first;" however, the source has earlier stated that the signing of the treaty would be followed immediately by blocking of access to Berlin on the ground and in the air (an act which the Soviets undoubtedly recognize as carrying a high degree of risk). Nor does this report or earlier reports by the source define what the first strike would be.

3. In general, we regard the report as relating to contingency plans rather than to a firmly decided course of action, although to the source, whose contacts appear largely limited to military circles, the distinction between these two may have become blurred. We are thus inclined to believe that the report, which we accept as an accurate reflection of the source's knowledge, presents considerable information, though incomplete and in a few instances of doubtful accuracy, regarding Soviet contingency planning in the Berlin crisis. We do not believe, however, that the report reflects knowledge of political factors necessarily involved in a decision of such importance as that of "striking first." It seems unreasonable that the Soviet leaders would not wish to give due consideration to developments in the negotiating process under way between the US and the USSR, or

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that they would already have made a firm decision to interfere with Berlin access after signing the treaty. We have insufficient evidence to accept or reject the implications of the report that Khrushchev is prepared to launch a general nuclear war if the West does not accept Bloc demands in the Berlin situation. We believe, however, the report must be taken seriously as reflecting a possible sequence of events in the Berlin crisis.

FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE WATCH COMMITTEE:

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Director

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